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THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

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THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

BY AUSTIN CLARKE

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ARGUMENT

The Vengeance of Fionn is based on the Pursuit of Diarmuid and Grainne (*Toruigheact Dhiarmuda agus Ghrainne*). The legend may be thus outlined : Grainne, daughter of King Cormac and the betrothed of Fionn, the leader of the Fianna, puts Diarmuid, one of the Fianna, under certain bonds (in Gaelic, *geasa*) to fly with her. They are pursued by Fionn, to whom Diarmuid remains faithful. They wander over Ireland. After many escapes, heroic combats and so forth, peace is made between Fionn and Diarmuid, and the latter settles down with Grainne in the cantred of Sligo. Diarmuid finally slays a magic boar, but is mortally wounded in the fight, and dies, taunted by Fionn. There is a resemblance between the Gaelic legend and the Greek tale of the death of Adonais.

The Poem begins in the middle age of Diarmuid and Grainne, and changes rapidly, visionally, to their youth and love,—so that the reader has an awareness of the past—ideal in itself, yet further idealized by memory—in the present.

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

Upon a stormful nightfall when the plain
And mountains darkened and the fiery forge
Of sundown under soot-black clouds of rain
Burned fiercest, like some angered demiurge
Brooding in iron through red-glowing smoke
Smeltered; up from the smouldering glooms one came
To Almhuin while the great slow raindrops broke,
Hot ridden from the westward fogs and flame
To Fionn, telling of friendship and of feast
Under Coiscorrain after stranger years
For him and the Fianna—and so ceased.
Then Fionn, returned from frays, among thick spears
Glimpsed in rain-hissed torches, loomed through night
Musing : and so at length the wanderers—
That once ate, supped, from cressy brooks—invite
Him to their rath ? And there were cauldron fires
Simmering, red-yew vats of mead and wine,
Grinding of wheat in querns, rich lavished food,
Shouts of hunters and slaughter of fattened kine . . .
Haply was love and childing grown wearisome
To them ? They would seek noisy multitude,
Fugitive from each other ? Yea ! he would come.

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

He turned to gloomy Durraing, "From the west
Diarmuid and Grainne loving send to me
Tiding of their friendship and of feast.
There we shall hunt down to the windy sea
Great stags"—the sudden light from wide-flung doors
Snatched the hosts from darkness—merrily
He muttered, "hound, perchance the mountain boars."

So on a gusty day
From bare stone mountains where the kittiwakes
Scudded and screamed beneath the clouds of grey
Sea-rain or tossed above the long black lakes
Whitening in the gale, at fall of night
Across brown boglands under mountain tops
That huddled darkly in the cold, wet light
Of westward rivers, through loud leaves and drops
Whirling from tattered trees the Fenians came
Into Rath Ghrainne.

There amid the glows
And ruddy warmths many-throated acclaim
Rang smitten from bronze crowded shields, and rose
Among the oaken rafters with slow smoke
And hot sweet savours of the feast, a tune
Harped from cold strings, laughter of women folk
Hurrying, rustle of feet on thickly strewn
Rushes : then silence, and a woman's voice

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

Speaking—O speech that once was sweetest song !—

“ Here in our rath, O Fionn, let us rejoice
Together. We have forgotten the old wrong
And put off foolishness with the wise years.”

As she smiled he saw the troubled births
And child-cares in her face, upon her lips
Langoured as of old, sad autumn light ;
Thereafter, darker, prouder, with his age
Diarmuid standing near.

And when the feast
Was loudest and the fiery torches gleamed
Upon the silver methers of mead, Oisín
Arose and sang of sorrow till men dreamed
Of women that were dead. But Fionn cried out :
“ Bitter that song. Chaunt us of spear and skeen,
How one sleety day on Sliabh na mBhan our hounds
Broke from the dripping bushes and a boar
Sprang,” he stopped. They heard strange trampled
sounds

And heavy breaths upon the night outside,
But Fionn bent his grey head, smiling, his mind
Druid-dark. The dagger guarded door
Was turned by Kerns and with a shriek the wind
Rushed in on them, laughingly Diarmuid cried :
“ Surely O Warriors our feast is good,

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

Its ripened savours call from hill and wood
Night's hungry farrows!" But Fionn looked up and
met
The eyes of Grainne.

In the deep of night
When all were slumbering Grainne woke from dreams
In sweating heat and tossed the heavy clothes
Aside and sat up in the silent gleams
Of moonlight hearing watchdogs at the gate
Begin to whine. "The moon is strangely bright"
She thought drowsing, "it must be at the full,
And the rain and wind gone from the sky . . .
O I am hot . . . there is the spindled wool . . .
And the three firkins." She listened. Her bedmate
Muttered from his sleep and started up
Calling with a loud voice "The hounds! They race
And bell down Beann Gulbain. Look! the boar
Bursts from the blood-wet bushes. Quick, my spear
With the long silken sling!" She felt his breath
Burning on her. "Hush! Diarmuid, you only hear
The mastiffs baying the moon. It is some dream
The Druid-dark puts on you. I saw his eyes
To-night." But he muttered. "I hear a fir
Talking, talking. There is a little thing
Gnawing at its roots. It will not stir.

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

What is it that is gnawing at the roots
And talking, talking there?" Then Grainne turned
And pulled him on her hot breasts until he slept.
Wearied she slowly sank through sleep and fled
All night in dark strange dreams and at the dawn
Wakening with the sunshine on their bed
She spoke to Diarmuid and found that he was gone.
But far away upon the hills she heard
The belling hounds, while somewhere near a bird
Sang.

II

At early day

Out in the windy sunlight on a hill
Beneath the forests of Beann Gulbain they
Stood and Fionn spoke gloomily : " Your will
And changeling years have taken her. The wild
Delicate girlhood and the lissom air
Of her are gone with the dead poppies. Her child
Is yours and all her ways. Only her hair
Burns arrogant across the black ravine
Of ruinous years " he stopped. Through a grey mist
Of dream he saw the girlish Grainne lean
Utterly from the past and then he felt
Her fingers quietly as dewfall prest
His brow and hoarsened he cried out : " You changed
White Grainne who was mine when ye fled west
The angered stars " then on the hillside ranged
And as a gale shoulders a mountain fir
Until it cries out and the dim roots stir
Deep in the clay and rock so Fionn leant
Fiercely upon his boar spear till it bent
Earthward. Thereat Diarmuid turned and said,
With bickered eyes : " Bitter is that reproof
O Fionn who know that it was Grainne led
Me under bonds of magic from your roof
To the bare hills without and we at night

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

Like waters wandering under the sky
Darkly." Rapidly came the other's reply
Like the raillery of summer rain : " Ah ! Yes,
Was not that magic sweet in your despire
Being but the bondage of her loveliness
And your desire ? Verily was't not sweet
To follow night as mountain streams the sea
And at dusk-faded lakes to cool her feet
Wearily burning and with wet green leaves
Or mosses staunch them while on stooping knee
You laughed up to her ? Surely a warrior's toil !
And the grim bond of your enchantment grieves
You yet to fury ? Does the mad blood boil
In the black cauldron of your heart and steam
Across your narrowed nostrils ? How sweet to mock
Me—Fionn—when you were wakened from some
dream

Feeling the drowsy arms of Grainne bind
You in white flame : " O Fionn !—an old grey rock
Beneath the sky, the cold arms of the wind
Flung amorous around him ! ' " The other spake :
" I loved her, Fionn. Laughing and light was she
But silent in our love and like a bow
Fiercely tense. Yet in a winter two
Learn to sleep sound together. I'll not wrong
A lover, no, not one ; though on her lips
Thinking, I have turned bitterly to long

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

For the loud swords and the stern comrades. You
Are wise in war. Are you not wise in love
And wiving? Leave anger to the years.
Remember, Fionn, how once you lay entranced
Upon the lonely crannog of the lake
Of Inish Tuile and the bluebells danced
And the winds whistled ye, unheard. I came
And slew three wizards at the sandy spit;
We feasted and mead splashed the torches' flame
From gold-red goblets, sudden, we saw them flit,
Three bearded shadows; then granite crags rang out
Dwindled with screams of night. Remember I
Drank with my thirsting sword in many a rout
And battle of yours." But Fionn laughed bitterly
And stared in darkness at the grassy ground
Unseeing, for his mind groped to his dead love
And towards the past his heart, a hungered hound,
Strained at the leash. "Let be, for I am old,"
He cried, "foolish and old. What have the old to do
With dreams the heated sinews of youth, no spears
Or staghunts weary, beget. His words can woo
No woman to him whose body is bent and cold,"
Proudly he towered through the mountain air,
"Old . . . Old . . . this whitlow, this thing for
women's tears
A moment's blood-drop; no more! Who'll snarl, rage,
Whelping his wounds? I am of that old breed

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

That's gone, begotten from the fire that's hid
In the loins of the cold rocks. Like a boy
Stubbornly courage'd this grew—this that's my own—
This Fianna sprung fiercely from my joy
Of generation, my hot impatient seed,
My manhood. Ye that are my blood and bone
Ambitioned, fighters, hunters of my years,
I see ye going O Fenians and I see
The fierce, the indomitable sun-welded spears
Snapt like saplings and the winter sky
Watching the desolate ruins on Almhuin hill
And the sterile plain. Loud the rut of stags
By stony Echtge, no hound on Leiter Lone,
Through the gray trees of Liathdroma still
The cuckoo voices float along the glen
But from the clouds the mountain cliffs will cry
For all their eagles of the bronze-flamed wings !
Aye, a brood of eagles, for we were men
That greatly lived and knew what 'twas to love
And what to hate !” Huge by his spear he stood
Rugged against the sky, upon his brow
The solemn sunlight. Remembering, he shrank
Into grey cunning : “ Foolish it were indeed
To wrangle on the aged ledge of life
Where I've scarce foothold. Diarmuid, let us go,
For staying, you wrestle with a worse than I
—Death, and know the evilness decreed

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

Upon the mountain of Beann Gulbain." He turned
From the hill, "O limp away," the younger cried,
"For I have come to hunt." "Would you be urned
Within a cairn of hillstones," Fionn replied
"Until a spider spins your dust? You know
That once we struggled down a windy shore
And through the storming welter and the foam
Heard a sea-voice withhold you from the boar
That whets the forest boulders of Gulban."

"It lied!"

"Diarmuid, no sword can fight the druid craft
And it is truth"

"And fate" the other laughed.

Hurrying from the dark-lit pines beneath
The Fenians scattered on the sunbrowned heath,
Bronze-girt Oscar, Caoilte and Oisín
Hailing Fionn and Diarmuid on the green
Hilltop. The poet musically lipped:
"As I came hither O Fionn I heard the sounds
Of otters swimming lakeward and glad calls
From height to height and sweetly belling hounds
Till louder than the roaring of the falls
At Assaroe the anger of your words
Foamed against the wind. O be not rash
Of tongue lest quicker than the silver flash
Of salmon leaping there, unscabbarded swords

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

Lighten between ye !”

But Fionn did not hear.

He stood knee-deep in ferns ; boar-like, his eyes
Glinting. He saw above the forest's verge
The black blunt precipice of Gulban rear
Skyward, the clouded mountain tops and three
Eagles in the high blue air like flies
Flickering around a solitary peak.
Below ; the windy hillocks dropped to the sea—
A blue-green-shadowed plain, and salt-white surge
Pawed round black capes. Then he heard Oisín speak
To the Fianna, “ Watch ye like a white cloud
Of seamews hovering with drooped pink claws
Over the green-hollowed waves for prey ?
Begone !” Caoilte laughing and Diarmuid say
Slowly mouthed “ O maker of the loud
War words that drive the foe like rooks and daws
From creaking elms, of songs that pluck out wrath
Even as a harper a rusted string, not you
But him whose taunts to me are as the froth
On a boar's hot fangs, I spurn, I spurn.” A raven flew
Like a black thought into the forest trees
Above and from the sun-green bracken Fionn stared
At its slow flight till like the sea-born breeze
Soughing through the pines below he heard
The voice of Diarmuid “ and if I no more
Come from the forest's jaws when yonder sun is red

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

O make for me a song Oisín lest men
That loved me once, wrong me when I am dead ;
Friend, friend, a song of laughter and of tears,
Of the glad sunlight and the glittering spears
Of springtime rain, my fights and wanderings
Conquest and love and sleep.
Tell that the clay of age could never creep
Coldly around my heart nor did I sit
Mumbling at a turf fire half blind with rheum
And maybe groping feebly in the gloom
Finger the leather breasts of a dumb hag
That once, O Gods, was the white Grainne. Tell
That as the lightning dancing on the crag
I snatched the joy of very life from doom.
Farewell ! ”

III

It is nightfall of the same day. At the river beneath Rath Ghrainne two boys may be vaguely seen in the dim changing twilights. They are speaking.

"I heard a trout leap
Under the bulrushes. I hear 't again "

"No. That was a waterhen
Diving. But I am hungry. Let us go,
It is dark and the linnets are asleep
But we will waken at the dawn and steal
Upon Beann Gulbain with the hound and spear
And we will pull ripe blackberries and peel
Hazel nuts and hunt among the pines until
The sun is red. Let you now string the trout."

"No, I will take the quicken rod."

"I will.

Hasten ! Hasten ! for the stars are out
And we must go."

"Ainnle ! as you stooped
To watch the roach hidden in the deep
Waters, I ran up to the crooked hill.
A rabbit bobbed out of a burrow and ran
Into a grassy tussock ; a great hawk flew
Slowly above the alder tops and drooped
Into the night, then I saw torches creep

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

Along Beann Gulbain through the darkened trees."

"It was the moonrise, maybe,"

"Hist!

Do you not hear a stir?"

"It is the breeze

Going about the reedy lake."

"A cry?"

"I hear a curlew crying near the sky."

"Look! Ainnle, look! the fairy mist

Is round us and the grass is wet. A fear

Is on me."

"Be quiet now. Here is the path"

"Ainnle! What is that still thing in the night?"

"Where, Youngling? I can only see the white
Mushrooms i' the grass."

"Upon the rath."

"A misty willow."

"But it turned and faced

Us, and when the moon shone out I saw"

"It is some woman who has come to draw

A pitcher of water from the well. But here

Is the gap beneath the sallies. Let us haste!"

IV

From the rath upon the darkened height
A woman gazed into the lonely night.
Long since the lowing of the un milked cows
And the faint bleat of lambs lost from their ewes
On cold grey hills had ceased. The far off cries
Of herds and hunters plashed i' grassy dew
With barking dogs, eager for the hearth fire
Draughts of thick mead, the swine flesh and goat cheese
And sweet sleep by their wives, had gone. No stir
—Silence and night, only beneath the trees
The river flowing into silence. Once arose
The pattering of feet along a path
Mingling with childish voices sweetly shrill
As the river on the pebbles. “O too fast
Ainnle, Ainnle !” floated beyond the hill.
The woman moved and listened as they passed
Moaning. Hour after weary hour went by.
The moon was clouded. Seaward, far away
Beyond the iron mountains, blackly cragged,
Beann Gulbain loomed.
Through the night the sound of feeble feet
Stumbled slowly, and a withered crone,
A rushlight in her claw-thin fingers, came
To the woman. “Child, child, ye are wet,”
She muttered, hobbling near and in the flame

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

Saw for a moment the white face. "Ye fret
And fret, poor child, and your two hands like stones
Lying in a cold pool. O childeen, come
From the damp air of night time. Those young drones
Are sleeping in their beds, and I stayed up
To find you." But the woman sat there dumb
And motionless. "O Grainne, I am old
And these poor withered paps once gave you suck
And these old arms have nursed you. It is cold
And wet out here." She wailed, remembering
How she had seen the girlish Grainne gaze
Even as now on the cold silver moon
With slender fingers clasped round her white knees
Shadowed in her hair, a sleepy croon
Upon her lips ; or on the summer days
Dance whitely through the daisies on the grassy lands
Of Temair where the great dewlapped cows grazed
Or stood in waters under elm trees
Staring. "O child, I have a gold-graved cup
Brimmed with sweet milk. It was drawn by a girl's
white hands
From the full udders of the red-brown cow
Grass-deep at lowing time and it is mixt
With honey sucked from clover by wild bees.
Come to the hot turves and put its taste betwixt
Your lips." She wrung her hands and keened "O dead !
O sorrow, sorrow this night, what will I do ?

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

Child . . . child." The woman slowly raised her head
And spoke "Hush ! I will go with you."

Under the dark rafters candlelight
Flickered uneasily and the shadows woke
And moved about the floors on noiseless feet.
But the two women crouching by the flame
Upon the hearthstone knew not. A murmur broke
The stillness "O child, child, I'll put on peat
For the fire's ashy and you are wet and cold.
It is late, sleep a little, sleep, and I will sleep
Too" and as she slumbered Grainne leaned
Gently and covered her. "The others keened
To-day" she thought, "and someone would not weep,
Not weep. Their eyes are heavy and sleepy now,
Tired with the long sunlight and now the day
Is old. I will be quiet though it is old,
Though all these days are old, these quiet days
That flowing slowly seemed one summer's day
Undarkened nor disturbed by night and sleep
But even as shining waters calmed in deep
Pools,—and all the peaceful household hours
And the garden of grasses and long purple flowers,
The swarmy murmuring of summer bees
Among the smoke-grey limes, the elm trees
Drowsing in the heat of the blue noon
Around the rath when the tired winds could pull

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

No leaf and from the grianan came the croon
Of spinning-women while the bundled wool
Turned on the droning spindle, sweet to me
As I sewed in the sunlight—and the prattled words
Of children and of waters at the fords.
Never on the hilltops shall I see again
Diarmuid and the antler-burdened men
Darkly speared against the saffron west
Homecoming. I will not look . . . it is some dream
That will go from me suddenly. No, no, no—
Yet I could almost weep that all these days
Are gone forever. Night from its flooded weir
Is rushing blackly on me and I must gaze
Into its gloom and I am full of fear.”

She leaned and slowly swayed,

“O little children of mine sleep, sleep, awhile

For it is night and all the birds are still.

O Connla of the dark curls do not stir,

The crickets sleep.” “I see my children smile,”

She murmured, “in their sleep. No, no, they are grown

And gone from me” . . . She drowsed then started up

“O Diarmuid, bitter it is

Through the long nights, lying awake, alone,

Stretching my arms to you in vain, in vain.

It was Fionn that hated you and betrayed

You. It was he pulled up the lonely tree

Of the tall windy nest and it is he

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

Brought sorrow and bitterness on me.

I am a woman, helpless, but if you were here
Diarmuid, you would rise up and catch a spear
And drive him though he were with his multitudes.
I do forget. Am I not beautiful ?

Has not Fionn sought me lovingly all day ?
There is sorrow more than a speary wound
To lure him to my lips and laugh and turn away."
"O Diarmuid, my dark strong love, my love," she crooned,
"We will go again, we will haste, to the lonely woods
Where the ripe red berries drop and quiet rain,
Where silver waters twinkle with swallow wings
And between the mountains grassy glens are full
Of sunshine and of little birds.

We will be there wandering and talking love
By the streamy ways and putting off old thoughts
Of the dark moons in a little place of trees.
It is I, calling you, Grainne, the beautiful,
Grainne, the lonely." She raised her proud head
As in the cold starlit air and the breeze,
She was shaken by old vehement
Joys till she forgot the summer days
Of a new hope, the quickening in her womb
That gave her heart sweet faintness and the throes
Of longed birth, the babes that sucked her paining breast
With soft closed lips and all the gentle kind
Ways a mother knows, the sleep and rest

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

That her cool hands like clouds of quietness bring
To children who are weary. Wild, enraptured,
Her love was reborn in wondering
And with a sudden brightness came
And dazzling her memory rose and wrought
Her to its likeness that was as a flame
Burning the toppled years and all her thought
Shook in passionate pulses and voices sprang
Around her like storm-exulting birds that sang
And rose and dropt in fire and rose again
Singing in the brightness, in the flame :
“O it is Grainne the golden, the beautiful
Who has not passed, who has not died
Though the flowers die. The years are light
Shining around her.” And one cried :
“As I went over Knocknerea at night
I saw a blossom, gleaming, golden-white.”
“Nay it was Grainne, the golden, the beautiful,
Grainne the flower-like.” And the Cailleach woke,
The aged one, and saw a dream-like form
Through the restless shadows of the smoke
And her lips muttered “Like a still white storm
A dawn-white creature broods upon the brink
Of joy, beautiful as Grainne alone
When she was young.” Her eyes began to blink
Cat-like, and nodding wearily, the crone
Slept.

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

And by the willows of the liss
The faery women spinning midnight wool
By moonlight murmured sweetly : “ Who is this ?
Shadow-haunted, mortal, yet so fair ? ”
“ O it is Grainne, the golden, the beautiful.
O it is she by whom the wings of air
Are brightened as they pass ”—so the faery spinning
wheels
Were crooning, crooning. “ As the light is fleet
So danced she, so sang. O who is this that steals
Through dusk ? What hilltops know her dancing feet ?
What lindens leaned to her and bitterns seen
By lonely streams of night ? ”
“ O then I ween
The echo of her singing wandered down
The gloom of darkened mountains like a lost
Curlew.” . . .

Lo ! at the banqueting the brown
Mead flowed, the torchlit company raised embossed
Cups. “ Drink, O drink to her,” Fionn loudly cried.
“ To whom ? O Fionn,” outrang and sheathed swords
Smote flatling till the blackened oaken boards
Resounded. “ O to whom, but her, my bride ?
O to whom but Grainne, the golden, the beautiful ? ”
And from the lips of all the loud words burned
“ Lo ! we drink to Grainne, the golden, the beautiful.”

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

Lightly then the slender harpstrings throbbed
Like the whispering of forest trees ;
' The beautiful, the golden.' Then all turned,
Saw by the threshold in the glinting light
Of spear-tops, raimented in gold and white,
Grainne standing. But the harps outsobbed
And with blanched lips the harpers rose and cried
" The harpstrings bleed our fingers and we fear
The shadows passing on the winds outside."
And in the sudden hush an old man said
" I hear far-off the host of shadows ride,"
And hurriedly a youth spoke " they are near.
Their sea-lit faces shine upon the night."
Then rose strange voices murmurous as a tide :
" O where is Grainne, the golden, the beautiful ?"
And like the flowing of sea-waves others cried :
" O where is Grainne, the golden, that was wed
Yet was not wife ? " And a sad voice replied :
" Lo ! Grainne, the golden, the beautiful, is dead
And her red lips are dust." The warriors sighed,
Bowed as if they sank in sleep. Arose
Grainne, the sweet-voiced, spake out laughingly
" O men, ye pale as poplars when wind blows
Rainily ! Ye drowse and grow afraid
Of dreams ! " Then turning kingward, " Look on me,
Father ! " and proudly rose to her full height
Like a huntress, silver-girt, from deep green trees

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

Glimmering forth. "Do I not live and breathe
And laugh? Am I not Grainne? Haply these
Warriors have tasted of a slumberous mead
Brewed from poppies and herbs by muttering crones
Under a sallow moon! Bestir, bestir
O men! Is't so ye welcome me? Let strings
Sweetly awaken with songs of Tara's kings,
Their queens and their queens' daughters!"

With flashing eyes
She looked upon the crowding faces, laughed:
"I have a wine, O warriors. Hear ye?
'Twas mingled on a morning by sweet craft
Of my fingers that all might madly drink to me,"
And at a sign her women glided in
Pale and silent, bringing wine to the men
And stole forth, Grainne with a golden cup
Gave to the chiefs, but towards the last she came
Wineless. Fionn watched her and feebly started up
Crying out 'O Treachery!' then sank
Among the sleeping throng.

But to the One
Grainne spoke: "All this have I dared for you,
The anger hidden in their unchallenged spears
And the aged frenzy of Fionn—O terrible
As a scream broken, yet I was for your sake

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

Laughing, scornful. And shall my traitorous tongue
Be now laggard, inconstant words perplex and I
Falter abashed like any heartsick maid
In the King's house whose foolish words are tears?
Nay, nay. I will speak. Sleeping, they dream of me
And their lips say that I am beautiful.
Shall I be bartered? The salmon will leap their weirs,
Tideward exulting!—My breath grows faint, the night
Is hot—'twill pass—'tis gone. I have given all,
All, though I am Grainne, deeming it light
Who am Grainne. I put you under ancient bonds
To bring me forth from this ruined revelry.
I choose, I put you under loving bonds
Gladly in peril, in darkness, to love me, defend me,
Diarmuid O Duibhne!"

With a word, she went
Forth among her women. Silent, pale,
They clad her and she hurried into the night.
A shadow rose up like a gaunt black tree
And stooped to her, crying out importunate
"O Grainne, hasten back lest all be late
And they awaken. Fly to the warm roof
Knowing how bitter are the barren hills
In the cold grey dawn"

"O what is this to me,
Diarmuid?"
"Foolish O Grainne were your flight.

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

Peace and a doorway of the sunlight, yours ;
But I was whelped by war, cubbed by grim clime
And suckled at the dugs of wolfish plight,
Aye, ribbed by lean famine, tanned as tawny neat,
Bare as a thornbush that the cold winds bite ! ”
Proudly he paused, then his words sped like sleet :
“ It is a bitter thing to bring reproof
And ranns of mocking poets on my name,
To make men hurl, from slings of fury, words
At me, to pull me down on knees of shame.
Aye then the sweet milk thickens into curds
And mead vats sour, the hot turf turns to dust
On the stone-flags that once was raked by swords.
It is a bitterer thing to bring me trust
In your white hands, O Girl of the green hills
Of Temair. You are Fionn’s, destined, espoused ;
And he is my chieftain and my friend.”
O slowly then she rose and her rich arms
Made glamorous the night, and joyously
The words came throbbing from her wild white throat :
“ Dearer at moontime the goatherd to the goat
Then the slow sweet crunch of juicy stalks
Or the grass-smelling air or slippery rocks
Tumbled on a mountain-top where hawks
Hang in the gray of day ! Yet do the free,
The wolf-suckled, follow in jostled flocks
The herd’s shrill whistle ? O I could sing

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

So glad and wild am I to-night ”

But he

Angrily bent and seeing the moonlight gleam
On her white sandals cried “Your little feet
Are naked !”

She laughed.

“O Grainne, return, return
For the night is chill and loveless.”

She shook

Gaily and from the braids across her brow
Upon her brightening shoulders her hair rained
Coiled gold :

“O all the night,” she sang “is mad
With music, on the waters of the mossy springs
Moth-pale moons are dandled and little wings
Run glimmering to the stars. Am I not glad ?
And beautiful ? And young ? O in the dew
I’ll lightly dance beneath a linden tree
Until the saffron dawn,” then laughed, “O You !
Pray is he soughten, cried to, who is crowned ?
Is he no less a King, haled to the throne
Unwilling ? Shall the ransomed clutch the ground
Hardened by their ageing feet and moan,
‘Sweeter to us the gloom than the white day
Stabbing our eyes. Begone ! Begone !’ Yet, pray,
Can the free have freedom thrust on them ?
A king, kingdom ? Shall loveliness break crust

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

And sup with starvelings? As I sat at noon
Fionn stole up secretly to me and bent
To kiss my broidered robe of white and gold;
Clumsied at my disdain, he turned away
Then would have held me—but I caught and drave
His dagger so that, fierce-laughing, he went.
Yet what though he is scarred by wars of old
And like the wintered wolves be gaunt and gray,
Ever is he kinglike. Stern is his will,
Swift is he to love, swifter to kill,
Gladly to the grianan I will go,
My maids will lose my hair and quiet as sleep
Barefooted with the moonlight I will creep
Into his couch."

But Diarmuid cried: "Not so"
And passioned caught her, seeing her dark eyes shine
With a strange light, ungirlish, and he swayed
Stormful above her as a mountain pine
Seen blackly when profoundest night is pierced
With silent lightning "Grainne, come to me,
O come to me." Impatiently he fierced;
"It is intolerable, not to be endured
For he is old and bitter. But I have needs,
Beloved of you. Yet think not I am lured
By cozening laughter, wheedled by a tear
Or chase the lapwing limping through the reeds
Unhurt. You are mine, swear me this. O swear

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

By wind and sun !”

A sob drowned in her panting breath
“Yours, yours alone !” O scarce heard words like wine
Drunk up. And fiercer this “Yea, until death !”

Then caught her raiment and her bosom, bare,
Rose white beneath her fingers and her hair
Brake from its fillets in tumultuous gold.

Joyously her murmurs trampled shame ;
“O rain’s but rain and cold no more than cold
And what are these to us, O Love, Love, Love” . . .
She clung to him shaken with sobs. He, wondering,
Comforted : “Fear not ! By its hot reeking root
I’d pluck out their lolled tongues of loud pursuit
Ere they should touch you, Love. Nor they being come
Loomed through a sinking dust-cloud shall we make
With bent brows a threshold of their feet nor cringe
And twitch bedraggled bordures for a crumb
Of beggary. Though all the unhazarded night
Be loud with harms, though sudden mountains hide
Chasmed blackness, though the strange waters are wide,
Yet shall all these be an idle burr torn off
Impatient, to us who have loved and laughed and gone
forth

Not to be hindered, night fled, unconquerable !”
He sprang to horse and caught her. The night rose in
a blast

And the shadows of the trees leaped up and galloped past.

V

The stars burned dimly from the east. Within ;
 The torches guttered, through the clouded smoke
 Of braziers the feasters loomed like a lonely brood
 Of boulders sunken in sleep. Wine redly spilt
 Was dabbled on their stiffened beards like blood . . .
 O she is gone forever who is wed
 Grainne the beautiful. The bridal bed
 Is desolate of her to-night and chill
 For her white body will not crush
 The soft fleeces and otter fells piled there.
 O idly were the fragrant rushes strewed
 That a red moon behind the windy hill
 Heard nightly whistling i' the silver lake
 And footing free as girls unwived till dawn
 When twittering like sparrows in the hawthorn hedge
 Cailins came dancing down, with osier creels,
 The dewy grass, and stopped, as lakebirds at the sedge
 To drink, then laughing waded in till their brown heels
 Sank in cool ooze. They sang : "O for the sake
 Of Grainne, the betrothed, the beautiful,
 We pull these thin green reeds." But one was wan
 Murmuring to the music of a thrush
 "O would, my heart, these reeds were plucked for us !"
 While in the dancing waters the others cried
 "O we will pull the pale wet water-flowers,

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

Branches of bogmyrtle, purple luss
And marigolds for Grainne's feet to crush !”
Slowly Fionn stirred and from a lingering dream
Droned sleepily, “O little Grainne, come
For I am weary of feast and apple-sweet song.
Too much about the heady mead men hum
Like grumbling bees round honey. Haste along !
One rushlight silver-sconced—so small, your breath
May flick it out !—will light our love. 'Twill make
Darkness but more dark !” He turned and stared
On the huddled sleepers through the floating smoke
And spluttered flame of resiny torches. He smiled.
Awaked, his sudden thoughts in dazzling light
Like bats sun-blinded beat against his brain
Till they were bloodied ; breaking from their pain
He towered through the torchy gloom and cried
“O Fools . . Fools . . awake ! Look to the doors !”
And fiercely shook the old King by his side
Sunken, a thin grey man robbed by his snores
Of royalty who woke and peevish chid,
Mutterful. But Fionn spurning him, king-rid,
Grasped at drowsy shoulders “Ye blind moles
From the black burrows of your sleep, come out !
Or I will rummage with my sword in holes
And crannies, stab and slay.” Arose a shout
And murmur of swords. “They stare at me and yawn,”
He foamed, then turned to them “O Grainne has fled

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

With Diarmuid O Duibhne. It is nigh the dawn.”
He snatched a torch and brandishing it ran
Down draughty glooms. Before the marauding man
Giant-shadowed, torchlit, as leaves from a storm
Rose women, wailful, fleeing. He looked around
A silent grianan and on the moon-white ground
Saw Grainne’s bridal robes, then frenzying:
“False-hearted, faithless, hot and lustful her haste
To loose the silken gold from her white waist
And wrap in rags. O how her garments gape
Hollowly, mocking her slender shape.”
He listened, hearing far away the wind
Pluck voices from the trees upon the height :
“O Grainne the golden, the beautiful, is gone
Yet whither who knows? Dark, sundering, is night
And who shall seek out her?
O Grainne, the betrothed, the faithless is fled
Ah! she, the beautiful, the whitely-gold
Is gone. O nevermore shall Fionn behold
Grainne, the girlish, the free, for she is wed
And woman evermore.” He hid his eyes
And mouth, fevered, in her soft robes—O they
Too madly faint, too sweet, of her!—and clung
Into their fragrance of her. Rising he swung
The torch spitting in fiery drops of pitch
“O Treachery!
I am befooled, left to grey dotage, spurned

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

Scarce-worn, I am cast off." The red-gold torque
Tightened on his throat and angered burned.
He tore it off—"yea even so with me.
Pitied and mocked at by my nudging men,
Aye, gaped by chattering women come to sun
Themselves and milk their babes or card white wool
Upon the raths. Diarmuid, the dark, has done
Evil to me this night, and Grainne the beautiful
My bride. I'll hunt them day and night from Dowth
To Errigal's black boulders, dig down every liss,
Tumble cromlechs and slay him like a calf.
O then I'll crush her sweet, sweet, maddening mouth
Under my lips. I'll kill her in a kiss
And laugh . . . laugh . . . laugh !"
Convulsive he tottered then sought the clamouring
crowd

"The chariots ! The hounds !" Arose uproar
Of running men and sobs of women cowed
In shadowy corners—through tapestries night airs
Whistled and waned—outside the torches tore
The night with windy flame—the frightened mares
And foals whinnied—hounds bayed their hunger—at
last

With shouts and tossing torchlights, swept in a blast
Through clouds of dark stampeded dust, lash-urged
The stallions screamed, the shuddering chariots creaked
Madder than mountain oakboughs stormfully wreaked

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

And the parched axles rumbling in the naves
Grew hot as when their hammered bronze was forged
Loud on the hissing anvils, stripped of flame.
So down the roads of Temair the Fianna came
Charioteered in thundering ; bloodhounds
Sniffed, fanged the wind and then in mighty bounds
Sprang at the throat of night. . . .

VI

Through dark ravines of cloud the dawning broke
In flashing cataracts of angered gold
On eagle crags; in mists of greyish smoke
The waters of the darkness, black and cold,
Spilled from the world's cliffs to the ocean pit.
Star-rushlights guttered out along the sky,
The peewits' whimpering began to flit
Across wet grasses and the cuckoo's sigh
Lingered amid a cloud of fitful trees
Where cobwebs hung with heavy drops of dew
Drizzled, as stags fled by, in silver foams.
Brown otters splashed among the reeds of blue
Lake-waters and the red bees' honeycombs
Beneath the ferns oozed thickly golden-bright
As frozen sunrays. Under shattered scarps
That gloomed like islands in the sea of light
High storm-swept branches sang in melodies
Like loud throbbing harps.

In the sleepy forest where the bluebells
Smouldered dimly through the night,
Diarmuid saw the leaves like glad green waters
At daybreak flowing into light,
And exultant from his love upspringing
Strode with the sun upon the height.

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

Glittering on the hilltops
He saw the sunlit rain
Drift as around the spindle
A silver-threaded skein,
And the brown mist whitely breaking
Where arrowy torrents reached the plain.

A maddened moon
Leapt in his heart and whirled the crimson tide
Of his blood until it sang aloud of battle
Where the querns of dark death grind,
Till it sang and scorned in pride
Love—the froth-pale blossom of the boglands
That flutters on the waves of the wandering wind.

Flower-quiet in the rush-strewn sheiling
At the dawntime Grainne lay,
While beneath the birch-topped roof the sunlight
Groped upon its way
And stooped above her sleeping white body
With a wasp-yellow ray.

The hot breath of the day awoke her,
And wearied of its heat
She wandered out by noisy elms
On the cool mossy peat,
Where the shadowed leaves like pecking linnets
Nodded around her feet.

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

She leaned and saw in pale-grey waters,
By twisted hazel boughs,
Her lips like heavy drooping poppies
In a rich redness drowse,
Then swallow-lightly touched the ripples
Until her wet lips were
Burning as ripened rowan berries
Through the white winter air.

Lazily she lingered
Gazing so,
As the slender osiers
Where the waters flow,
As green twigs of sally
Swaying to and fro.
Sleepy moths fluttered
In her dark eyes,
And her lips grew quieter
Than lullabies.
Swaying with the reedgrass
Over the stream
Lazily she lingered
Cradling a dream.

A brown bird rises
Out of the marshes,
By fallow pools flying

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

On winds from the sea,
By pebbly rivers,
Tired of the salt gusts
Sweetly 'twill whistle
On a mountainy tree.
So, gladdened, impulsive,
Grainne arising
Sped through the bluebells
Under the branches,
White by the alders
Glimmering she
Stole in the shadows,
Flashing through sunshine,
Her feet like the raindrops
On withered leaves falling
Lightful and free.

She stood beyond the reddening hawthorns
Out in the wild air
And gathering back with white-lit fingers
Her wind-loosened hair,
She scanned the dark bog-waters
Sleeping beneath the bare
Turf banks and the wide brown marshes,
But she could only find
The froth-pale blossom of the boglands
As it fluttered on the waves of the wandering wind.

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

So she came, a little saddened,
Bending with the slim breeze
Through the elm-misted sunshine
And flowers like pools of blue seas.
Quiet as her breath she glided
In the grass-green shade of trees.

A bird sang like a rainy well.
Then on a fallen bough
A hurrying footstep spoke, and Diarmuid
Stood before her now,
Sunburnt, pine-straight, the hilly breezes
Upon his lips and brow.

Once they rose up and wandered with the day
Southward along the broken hills and strips
Of grass that huddled round the stones of grey
Defiles. The sultry scarlet of her lips
Flowered brightly in the sad uncoloured air.
Shadowless they went, for at the noon
Through clouds of drifting rain in a white glare
The wet sun peered out like a sunken moon
In darkened waters. On the slopes, no light
Windily dancing ; only skies of lead

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

And the blood-bright flower. There love would seem
the lust

Of those whose shrivelled bodies are nigh dead
Being bruised with years, and youth the crazy dream
Of their bedridden brains : but a bright sun
Draws forth white cloud-foam from the ocean stream
And sweetness from flowers and men. So they went on
Beneath the grey gloom till with weary feet
They rested by hoarse waters mumbling 'mid
The sally roots and bitterer than sleet
Pelting in narrow gusts, a sorrow hid
One from the other.

With the evening time
They saw a tide of sunlight, rising, surge
Through gloomy loughs among the clouds and sweep
In dazzling floods along a grassy gorge
Beneath gaunt rocks or on some woodland steep
Or splashed upon a rainworn granite brink,
In saffron pools through banks of shadow flow
And in wild tortuous tree-torn cascades sink
Into the blackness of the glens below.
Once in the green gap of the south there shone
A mist of men and bronze-red spears awhile.
And so for lonely leagues they journeyed on
Through the greyness of a mountainous defile
Cobwebbed with silence.

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

Wet winds and seagulls' cries
Arose when to the western capes they crossed.
A sudden redness flashed within their eyes
Against the sunset seas that wildly tossed
And drenched the stormful clouds in crimson spume,
And sucked the golden rays from mountain peaks
In gleaming whirlpools down the blackened gloom,
Then redly ebbed in the cloud-darkened creeks.
As from the sudden shadow of a hawk
In the red skies a tumult of black wings
Broke on the blast, flying from fairy things
Unseen. The sunset like a scarlet bruise
Angered. Night slowly sank. In quietness he
Carried the weary girl through thickening dew.
The white wave of her body drowsily
Rose, fell, to her slow breathing ; lulled in a far
Faint warmth, half swaying in a dream
She watched with sleepy eyes a seaward star
Welling through a long purple depth of air
In silver drops ; it passed in a swift gleam,
For he had gathered her as a stooping wind
Closer than night and they had come to where
A giant group of storm-gnarled crags withstood
The star-glutted skies like a black wood
Of battled oaks, the shelving roots entwined
With berried ivy clusters, and they lay
Beneath a star-hid cleft of crouching stone

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

On fern leaves. Once she wakened and alone
Amid the heavy night hush far away
She heard the darkened waters of the deep
Murmuring as a child in dreamful sleep.

At the wet windy dawn he clomb the crags
And saw the grey sea breaking on grey shores
Through smoky mists, and bitterly he thought
Of their long wanderings : how once he fought
Among the bluebells and sunny forest trees
And came to her at nightfall, of friends he loved
Pursuing him.

So with the mornings they fled
Until the candle of the sun burned red
Behind black cliffs. Sometimes in seaweed caves
They lay and heard the hissing crash of waves
Or murmurous in the mountain glens all day
The booming of the ocean far away,
Shell-slumbering, unquiet as their fears.
Sometimes from hilltops Diarmuid saw far spears
Sun-streaming in narrow glens. And so they came
South and at night into a silent land.
Under grim black mountains, silver lakes
Glinted and the forests seemed of gloomy yews.
They crossed a beach where white fog waters crept
Like moonrise and beside the lakeshore slept
Under black trees.

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

Night waned.

The saffron dawn

Shimmered beyond the distant mountain peaks,
Rainy silver dartled on the lakeward creeks
And sea-clouds of pale yellow floated west
Along the hills. They wakened with the birds
In greenish sunlight listening to the words
Fluttered from the leaves above, then rose
And gazed upon the lake. Beside a pond
Of sallies Diarmuid cut a glossy wand
And with red rowan berries 'ticed the trout
Basking in the shallows where hill streams
Rippled sunnily. He drew them out
Through the swift brightened air in wet curled gleams.
After with crackling twigs they kindled fire
And as it smouldered palely on the bright
Sun-coloured moss he leaned and spoke to her :
" O Grainne let us climb the cool breezed height."
He looked—across the silver shining lake
And islets thick with grassgreen trees asleep
Like their long olive shadows in the deep—
Upon the mountain forests, waterfalls
Unravelling white sunlight from the crags
Above, furze yellow slopes and far away
Blue misted summits.

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

“Yonder, bounding stags
Antler the wind unstalked, the squirrels play
Beneath the red-stemmed pines in thrushy glens
And streamlets trickle through cool moss.”

“O sweet
The fluty blackbirds, Diarmuid, and the wrens
Flutter and warble here ”

“Sweeter, from the heat
To lie i' green-dimmed woodlands thou and I,
Or, the last summit gained, under the sea-blue sky
We two, beyond pursuit, forever free, our feet
Eagle-high !”

At noon they rested in a copse of birch
High on a mountain. Through the leaves, cool rays
Of sunlight slanted past the shining bronze
Of stems. He clambered down through brambled ways
And leaned from a rock of ivy—

Far below
Around the isles of alder wild white swans
Lilied the blue waters of the lake,
And grassy slopes rose from the rush-green shores
Into the yellow whins. Past glens of sycamores
And scarlet-berried rowans he saw dark pine
Under the glittering granite and the shine
Of laky hills far off.

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

“O Grainne, come

With me.”

They hastened toward the mountain top
Above them, climbing sunnily, floating by
The yellow seethes of gorse, rivulet sprays
And grasses the light breeze shuttled. Sprung on high
He stooped windlike, and drew her to a brown ledge
Of ferny rock. Breathless on the blue edge
Of heaven they stood enskied, then lay in soft deep
moss

Under white-purple heatherbells, their gaze
Thirsting through the sun-dissolved blueness above.

“O Grainne, Grainne, wild Love

Of my heart, we two are free, are free,”

He sang, “in this land of lonely lakes

And lush south valleys. Here no hazy blue

Smoke o’ turf rises and no children wake

The laughter of the rocks. Here, long ago

Among the lake-trees the Danaan Len

Godlike wrought gleaming gold amid a flame

Of rainbows. Before the years or him two lovers
came

—May be ! May be !—and sang and danced at day

By the laughing lakes or clung together passion-still

In the hushed blue waters through the summer noons

And all the night amid the forests moved

Like fierce joy-thirsted moons.

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

O was this long ago ? And where are they ?
Is she as beautiful and is he still beloved ? ”
But Grainne gazed into the bright blue skies
Silently. He said, “ We were pursued
From sleep to sleep, seacave to flooded glen.
I have slain things in darkness. I waked and went
Nightly from our hazel sheilings, stood
Like a hunted stag sniffing the breeze.
Remember once we heard old sallows, bent
Like hags crouching to their thin huddled knees
Over the waters, muttering ; we looked
And all the farther riverbank was sedged
With spears, and dawn behind, the broad white dawn
That ever tracked our sleep. Had not Fionn pledged
Loudly to loose the ferrets of a thousand spears ?
And I, hunted I thought me poor
Who had all, friendless and I did not see
The weary rain-wet face that would make men
Turn from their dreams outdreamed and poets sing no
more.

What have the old, the tired, to do with love,
To pilfer pleasure and dote and think they dream ?
O it is for youth, only for arrogant youth,
To love and love ! ”

But Grainne gazed upon the quiet skies
And saddened he thought “ O Heart, it is too late
Since her white hand pulled open the little gate

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

Of silence. All the sweet strangeness of her
Has gone from me and I am like the air
Remembering dead wings. O bitterest love
Brooding on its own love. But O that we
Had seen and loved like Lovers long ago ;
Self-found, each in the other's mystery.”
He turned and watched her as she lay
There, how the purple-coloured lips of heather flowers
Touched her lissom limbs languored with rest
And how her cloud-gold hair would softly rise
And fall, lying along her girlish breast.
“It is too late. I know her utterly.”
And his heart cried. “Is it too late, too late ?”

But as she gazed upon the silent skies
While the sweet slowness of the sun-hours
Was drooping through the hot blue day,
Grainne once heard his voice from far away
Murmurously lost—

“There is an isle
Beyond the red waves of the sunset where
The foam is never finned by the brown prows
Of currachs nor keels grate the pebbles while
Men's heaving shouts fly low along the air
Like cormorants, only the sleepy boughs
Cluster with murmurous music and the Ever-Young

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

Sway with the wearied flowers in cold white joys
Amid an ancient purple light. Immortal, they
Have lost their dreams, their dreams.

This was a song

Made by a druid on a summer's day
From sorrow.

Thou ! thy beauty gathers their lost dreams
Even as lulled waters the green gleams
Of willows, making them more beautiful.

Thou ! sweetly human, dream-strange yet to be hurt
By a chance nettle, hast known inalienable tears
And stumbled with a noon's hunger. Yet, Love
to be

Piteously human is sweetest !

Lo ! by the fiery spurt
From the pith of a poor reed the Charioteers
Have stormed the darkness of the night."

His words

Were isled in silence.

Towards the evening time
Hearing faint melodies, they knew the birds
Were singing far below. Down heathered ways
They wandered. Vague trees rose through a golden
haze

Of sunlight and they saw the evening lake

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

Gleaming amid the leaves. Then in a glade
Of grassy daisies where tall sycamores
Fluttered their yellow leaves upon the air
Like pale sunlight, Diarmuid swiftly drew
His strong arms over her till she was blind
With madder sunlight and she cried,

“As dew

I am sun-thirsted, sun-anhungered, me,
Me, snatch sunward ! Time drops like a wounded bird
And all my days are burnt in utter light.”
Then as some island hears the storming sea
Murmur far down in its dim heart, she heard
Him speaking :

“Grainne, Grainne, lean your white
Slender throat back, as if you were now dead
Among the fallen leaves, for I dare grieve,
So strange is joy.”

Then she lay very still
With closed eyes dreaming of the sweet quiet sloth
Hour by hour of trees. She was unloth
To move, knowing him near.

“And do you sleep ? ”

He said, “I weary of sorrow.”

But she lay there

Silent.

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

“O Grainne, look on me . . . your hair
Shines on me . . . wake . . . awake !”

His voice was

shrill

With love and looking up she saw the red
Sunset behind him and the shadows of the night.
“Grainne, my Grainne” he murmured, “We are free,
Alone in green twilight glades. O, Come to me
Like night. Thy love has waked in me love beyond
love.

As on the starry night of Beltené
A bonfire blazes and lo ! height speaks to height
In flame after flame, light beyond soaring light.”
But Grainne, the wild, the beautiful, fled
Up slopes of thickly clustered fern where red
Sunrays were glimmering through black-green gloom
Of oaks and up a brightened copse of fir
Out into the dusk-blue air she sped
Along the mountain. The wind ran with her
And a voice cried : “O stay with us, O stay
Lest thou should'st know of grief.” But she
Hastened up the mountain moor. Black birds
Specked the red west. She heard a philibeen
Pipe near lonely waters ; and still the wind
Ran with her and cried : “Away ! Away !”

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

By aged rocks, and tussocks of sun-browned grass,
Still gleams of curlew pools, red-purple heath
Bedimmed, she hurried through a sombre pass
Of cloud-grey cromlechs. Breathless from the height
She gazed down sloping treetops, far beneath
Into a valley.

Through the pale blue light,
Beyond, great eagle crags and cliffs rose sheer
From dark green seas of pinewoods ; a tall weir
Of cloudlight. In black larches the rock-snows
Of cataracts, violet misted as rainbows,
Gleamed. Down glades of yellowed elmtrees
By bluebells glimmering through russet ferns
Moths floated whitely ; late birds—where red bees
Slept—gurgled like the hazel shadowed ponds
Rain-loud with pebbled runnels. Below, past green
Tufted grasses, brambles and brown sloes
Streams flowed through sedgy alders far away
Into a lake—a narrow silver sheen
Darkened with isles of willows. Hazes of rose
Trailed westward, yet. Above the purpled grey
Of mountain summits in the deeps of blue
The first faint stars were glistening like dew.

Gladdened, on the lonely height
Grainne lingered in the glimmer
Of the blue faded light.

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

Above the hushed valley
The crooning pines were darker
And round the lakeward mountains
Rose the purple shadows of the night.

Grainne, sweetly
In the gleamy twilight
Sang to the murmurous pines below—
How, long ago,
A lonely girl at star-rise
Waded in the rock pools
By the sand-grey sea,
Till the dark poet Dedach
Wandering by the waters
Saw her lips were sunset-red ;
And ever by the rock pools she waited
Weeping bitterly :
“ Brown seaweed left at ebbside
Would I were dead.
O ! Sorrow, Sorrow, Sorrow,
He has gone from me.”

Grainne, delicately, lightly,
Danced down the moss,
So whitely
Dandelions toss.
Joyous, her singing

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

Lingered in the pale blue air
And Diarmuid hurrying on the mountain
Saw her drooping
Beneath a lonely tree.
Loud he cried "Night falls and woodlands darken.
Come, O Grainne, come to me!"
But through the slender pines she faded
Like a gleam of snow.
"O Sorrow, Sorrow, Sorrow,"
Rose through the leaves below
And dark on the hill
He heard her voice wandering down the valley
"O Sorrow, Sorrow, Sorrow,"
And all the woods were still.

He gazed at the stars
And the drowsed purple mountains
Then hastened through the dark green shadow
Of the pine trees.
Strange faint hushes
Rose slowly round him
And an elmy breeze
Sighed as waters of day
Far away.
Through the flitting pines he hurried
Calling "Grainne, come to me
Night is here and woodlands darken

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

Come, O Grainne, come to me."

Out to a blue twilight

He wandered and the grim

Purple shadowed mountains

Sprang up and beckoned him.

In a glen of elms

As he sped

Ancient noises slowly stirred and wakened

And like aged birds heavily fled.

Soon through the starlit forest

Pale fragrances

Of blossomy elder

Floated around him.

"O Grainne, Grainne"

He called and in a happy glade

Of bluebells and sleep

Under dim green clouds of elms

He heard a woman weep.

She slowly rose and came with night to him.

Strangely they paused, gazing, they two alone

"Diarmuid"

"O Grainne"

—and their voices were one.

VII

It is morning of the next day. In the sunlight a girl awaits on the height of Rath Ghrainne. A young man comes to her from below. He speaks laughingly :

“ I saw you, Love, from the sheepfield that is white
With mushrooms and you like an apple bough
Blossoming by the stonewall in the bright
Early sunshine.”

“ It is sunny now.”

“ The rainy seawind's gone. It will be fine.
Look ! there's not any cloud but on the brow
Of Beann Gulbain. They'll climb there to-day,
And search the ancient forest of black pine
Where the night is mildewed, for the dead
Body—”

“ O you are wet ! ”

—“ The stepping-stones

In the river were slippery—They say
That there were spells on him, it was foretold
And the bacach that talks at the water's edge
All night, was pulling up the muddied sedge
In the dawnlight as I passed, and he spat out
And began to swing his hairy arms and shout

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

That he knew and he knew, he knew he knew
It was more than a mountainy pig that slew
Diarmuid O Duibne."

"When I woke up
I heard two cailleachs talking from bed to bed
And one muttered 'It was like the night
When we were young girls.' 'And our skin was white
And we'd be washing it in the streams' the other
wheezed.
'The shadows were going by all night' they said,
'And they were singing, singing, and a hurt thing
Was weeping somewhere!' Then one turned and
seized
Me and cried 'Be off, young pry.'"

"If I were there!"

"And I saw poor Grainne in the sunlight
Wrinkled and ugly. I do not think she slept.
My mother says that she was beautiful
Proud, white, and a queen's daughter long ago,
And that they were great lovers in the old days—
Before she was married—and lived in hilly woods
Until they wearied.
I do not want to grow so old like her.

THE VENGEANCE OF FIONN

O it is best to be young and dance and laugh
And sing all day and comb my sleepy hair
In the startime, and never, never, grow old."

"O shiny Dew

O little wild Bird of the air
Youth only is wisdom and it is love."

Spring 1917.

A CLIFF SONG

Blue star-rise above the green wave
And the sun in yellow flame
When like a white seabird, O Maeve !
To the cliffs you came.

And I, like a lonely tree
Upon a wave-wet ledge,
Heard the wintry crying of the sea
As the wind through sedge.

You came. On wing so still
No homing bird could flit,
When the moon was white upon the hill
And the stars were lit.

Autumn 1916.

NOTES

Grainne is approximately pronounced (Grawn-yá^u), Fionn (Finn), Oisín (Usheen).

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| Page | 1. <i>Almhuin</i> (Aloon)—The Hill of Allen, on the great plain, the site of Fionn's chief rath. |
| „ | 2. <i>Rath Ghraíne</i> . The Rath of Grainne, Corrain, Sligo. |
| „ | 4. <i>Beann Gulbain</i> , a mountain in Sligo, on the borders of Donegal, now called Benbulbin. |
| „ | 27. <i>Grianan</i> —a sunny house, room, set apart for women. Pronounced (green-awn). |
| „ | 20. <i>Knocknereva</i> , a mountain cape in Sligo, haunted by the <i>sidhe</i> (shee, 'faeries'), the burial place of Queen Maeve. |
| „ | 20. <i>Cailleach</i> , an old woman, Grainne's foster nurse. |
| „ | 29. <i>Cailins</i> —girls. Pronounced (colleens). |
| „ | 29. <i>Creels</i> , baskets. |
| „ | 30. <i>Luss</i> , the foxglove. |
| „ | 32. <i>Dowth</i> , a great tumulus in the green valley of the Boyne. The great stone chambers engraven with hieroglyphs, wherein the Druids brooded and buried the dead, can still be visited through a long deep passage in the hillside. There, around the Boyne, the spirit of Aongus—the unseen protector of Diarmuid—was. |
| „ | 33. <i>Temair</i> , Tara of the Kings. |
| „ | 44. The forests, in the Gaelic Legend called <i>Doire dha Bhóth</i> (the wood of the two bothies). |
| „ | 34. Scene. Donegal. |
| „ | 44. The lakes of Len, now Killarney. Len was one of the mysterious <i>De Danaans</i> ; and wrought like <i>Mulciber</i> or <i>Tubal Cain</i> . |
| „ | 44. Lovers. <i>Aongus</i> , the Irish god of Love. |

NOTES

- Page 50. *Cromlech*, a boulder (lit., a crooked stone), usually applied to stone circles, or dolmens, which were called *Leabthacha Dhiarmuda is Ghrainne*, The Beds of Diarmuid and Grainne.
- „ 54. *Bacach*—a blind man, a beggar.

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